

LENOS MAVROMMATIS (Athens)

Andronikos II Palaiologos and the monastery of Zographou (1318)

I was fortunate enough to secure permission to photograph the medieval archive of the monastery of Zographou on Mount Athos and carry out a study of its contents from 1977 to 1980.¹

By way of announcement of the publication of a full catalogue of the archive I edited and annotated two documents from the monastery's collection.² The medieval archive of the monastery of Zographou contains one hundred and ten documents written in Greek and just eleven in Old Slavonic.³

For a number of years now at the Centre for Byzantine Research at the National Hellenic Research Foundation, and with the kind assistance of Liza Benou, a diplomatic edition of the archive is in the process of being published and the reconstruction of the history of the monastery of Zographou during the medieval period is being attempted. The catalogue and diplomatic analysis of the documents will shortly be ready for publication.

The landed property of Zographou appears to have been considerable, although it was less than that of Vatopedi, Great Lavra and Chilandari. However, I should like to take a closer look at the property and, by extension, power of the two monasteries – Zographou and Chilandari – both on Mt Athos and elsewhere, and to draw a number of comparisons.

Both monasteries enjoyed dual protection: one the one hand, that of the Byzantine emperor, and on the other, that of foreign rulers such as the czar of Serbia in the case of Chilandari, and the czar of Bulgaria in the case of Zographou. Indeed the records speak of „the monastery of the Serbs” when referring to Chilandari, and „the monastery of the Bulgarians” when referring to Zographou. The protection of either the Serbian or Bulgarian ruler was decisive: Serbia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was the most tightly organized political unit of the Balkans. Led by dynamic personalities and the economic strength to back them, it understandably sought to dominate the region. By contrast, Bulgaria during this same period had become divided into numerous warring feudal states more or less influenced by Byzantine, Serbian or Mongol foreign policy, and it was in no position to offer the monastery of Zographou a stronger economic or political role. In essence, the

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1. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the fathers of the Holy Epistasia of Athos and the monks of the monastery of Zographou without whose undivided support and encouragement this study would never have been possible.
 2. L. MAVROMMATIS, *Le Chrysobulle de Dusan pour Zographou*, *Byzantion* 52 (1982.) p. 351–356 and plates I–IV; Μεσαιωνικό Αρχείο Μονής Ζωγράφου: Έγγραφο πρώτου Δαροθέου, Αφιέρωμα στον Ν. Σβορώνο (Essays presented to N. Svoronos), vol. I, Rethymno 1986, p. 308–317.
 3. For purely technical reasons I confined myself to photographing and describing the archival documents up to the year 1600.

survival or prosperity of the monastery of Zographou depended far more on the protection afforded it by Constantinople than on the czar and other Bulgarian princes.

In this context, let us now take a look at an unpublished document: a *prostagma*, or imperial command, held in the archive of Zographou, under the designation Ω/21, written on paper of dimensions 245 X 300 mm. It is in a moderate to poor state of preservation on account of damage caused by damp. The date and imperial signature are written in cinnabar, which has spread slightly because of the damp. The ink of the main text is the dark brown customarily used in the fourteenth century. There are no scribal notes on the verso of the document. A few lines of this document were reproduced in a note published by the editors of the *Βυζαντινά Χρονικά*, though they were unable to trace its source. P. Uspenskij did succeed in uncovering a fragment of the document in the archive of Zographou, which the aforementioned editors had earlier claimed to be lost.⁴ However, I was fortunate in finding the original document containing this text. The document was addressed to the *Protos* of Athos, Isaak, and it bears the following *menologema*: „In the month of September, the second indiction”. The question which naturally arises is who was the emperor referred to in the document, and precisely what date should we ascribe to this „second indiction”? The nature of the recipient of the document, the *Protos* Isaak (perhaps the most important political personality of Mt Athos and, more generally, an outstanding figure in Byzantium during the first half of the fourteenth century)⁵, compels the modern historian to choose the years 1318 or 1333. It is worth recalling that Isaak died under somewhat mysterious circumstances, confined within the city walls of Constantinople in 1342. Evidence provided by the document adds at least one further detail. The *prostagma* was sent by the emperor to the *Protos* Isaak with the aim of securing the support of the latter for the demands of the monks of Zographou, demands which had already found the approval (I quote) of „her Highness the empress of the Bulgars, and most beloved daughter of my Majesty”. As we shall see below, the other details in the document are obscure and refer chiefly to an old dispute between the monastery of Great Lavra and Zographou over farm land and vineyards whose position and extent are not specified in the text.

The *Protos* Isaak, an almost legendary figure who could well rival the resourceful hero (and ex-member of the Holy Inquisition) of „The Name of the Rose”, not only had close links with Andronikos II, Andronikos III and John Kantakouzenos, but was also on good terms with foreign rulers: he had handled a number of state affairs that, under normal circumstances, surpassed the role of the *Protos* of Mt Athos, and which may well account for his mysterious death.⁶ It was to Isaak therefore that the emperor (we shall see *which* emperor) addressed the *prostagma* seeking to resolve an issue which, if our hypothesis is correct, amounted to more than the usual kind of disagreement (such as we frequently come across in the archives) between the two monasteries over a few – as yet unidentified – fields and vineyards.

4. W. REGEL, E. KURTZ and B. KORABLEV, *Βυζαντινά Χρονικά*, Appendix 1, Actes de l'Athos, IV. Actes de Zographou, no. XXX, Amsterdam 1969, p. 72 (=Actes de Zographou).

5. On the *Protos* Isaak see the references in the Athos records contained in L. MAVROMMATIS, *Οι Πρώτοι Παλαιολόγοι*, Athens 1983, p. 67, 95–96 and 112.

6. See L. MAVROMMATIS, *op. cit.*, p. 96 and n. 45 for relevant bibliography.

We consulted the documents of Zographou and Great Lavra. The *prostagma* does in fact mention earlier rights and privileges, and the first document in the Zographou archive was issued by the *sevastokrator* and governor of Thessalonica (1267), confirming that the disputed land was indeed the property of Zographou.⁷ More specifically, it mentions the fact that there had been disagreement between the monasteries of Great Lavra and Zographou in the past over the question of the ownership of certain areas of land in the region of Proavtax, and that the issue had been brought to the secular authorities' attention on many occasions and had been decided in favour of Zographou. Moreover it mentions that, by command of the emperor, the *sevastokrator* Tornikios had been appointed to look into the matter and that his verdict had once again been in favour of Zographou. Once again the monks of Great Lavra appealed to the emperor requesting that he issue them with a new chrysobull, by sending an „old” but forged chrysobull to the imperial secretaries as evidence of former imperial confirmation of their rights. Tornikios, as far as we may gather from the documents, was persuaded and promptly ordered that a committee be appointed to oversee the return of the disputed land to the monks of Great Lavra. However, some time later it was discovered that the document was a forgery and Zographou requested a new imperial decision on the matter. But the relevant documents belonging to Zographou appear to have been lost and so the monks were granted new land in the area of Proavtax and Rachonia. The names of these fields (Loustra, Armenon, Kryos Kampos, Tympanaris, Loukitzis, tes Graos to Pedema – *Crone's Leap* – and various others) are mentioned in a number of other documents in the archives of the monasteries of Athos, and there is no need to go into further detail about them here. A few years later in 1268 the new governor of Thessalonica, Alexios Doukas Nestongos, was to take up the same matter and once again the decision fell in favour of the monks of Zographou.⁸ The land in this particular case is mentioned in documents of Alexios Amnon, Apelmene, Pharisaios and Pergamenos.

According to all these records the dispute took place in the years 1309 and 1321. However, the only doubt which need concern us here dates to 1142 when Maria Tzousmena, a member of the emperor's family, made her initial donation.⁹ More documents then followed, but these do not directly concern the subject of this communication.

To return to the *prostagma*, we are perhaps obliged to accept the fact that the dispute between Great Lavra and Zographou concern only this particular region and had in fact begun long beforehand. Eventually the emperor took up the matter in a decisive and firm way after complaints from the monastery of Zographou that the land had been left wholly uncultivated because the monks of Great Lavra had refused to return the land to Zographou, despite successive official statements recognising the fact that it belonged to the latter monastery. Characteristically, the emperor declared that he considered it unnecessary for the matter to be submitted yet again to secular investigation and the political authority of the governor of Thessalonica. Instead, he decided that the *Protos* Isaak should judge the matter by summoning both sides to submit their case against one another, and then Isaak should decide in favour of the monastery which he believed to be in the right, for (and here I quote

7. *Actes de Zographou*, no. VI, p. 16–18.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 19–24.

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 12–16.

verbatim the words of the *prostagma*) „the emperor could not conceive that Lavra would deal unfairly with the monastery of Zographou”. The emperor further required that Isaak’s decision be sent on to him so that the whole affair at last be brought to a close, especially since this had been requested by the empress of the Bulgarians.

The editors of the Βυζαντινά Χρονικά proposed tentatively 1333 (being also a second indiction), as the year of the issue of the *prostagma*. It is necessary, however, to revise this dating for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Theodora Palaiologina, wife of the czar Michael Šišman, was already widowed by 1333. After the czar Michael was killed in the battle of Velbuzhd, Theodora returned to Constantinople. Naturally this would not have deprived her of the right to be called Queen of the Bulgarians.

Secondly, the vast majority of the archival documents that were drawn up either by the imperial secretaries or by the regional administrators, whether secular or ecclesiastical, between the years 1250 and 1320, suggest that the whole affair concerning the disputed land had reached an impasse.

Thirdly, in his *prostagma* the emperor refers to the queen of the Bulgarians as his „daughter”. It would be difficult to imagine that Andronikos III would call his sister „daughter”. On the other hand, Andronikos II in the documents refers to Michael as his son and „gambros” („son-in-law”).

We are therefore compelled by the evidence to reject the proposal of 1333 for a dating, and to suggest 1318 as the better candidate and Andronikos II as the author of the *prostagma*. The intervention of the empress of the Bulgarians was purely a matter involving Palaiologina, widow of the Bulgarian czar Smilec (1292–1298),¹⁰ granddaughter of Michael VIII Palaiologos, daughter of Constantine Palaiologos, brother of the emperor Andronikos II. Palaiologina, described by Metochites as „most resplendent, good and resilient *niece* of the emperor, and empress of the Bulgarians, so soon cast into the mourning of widowhood by the cruel blows of fortune”,¹¹ following her unsuccessful attempts to win the support of the Bulgarian ruling élite and strike up a marriage alliance with the King of Serbia Stefan Milutin (1299), returned, disappointed in her ambitions, to her native Constantinople. We have to accept that, according to both the traditional Byzantine outlook and to the well-established practice of the Palaiologans with regard to members of their wider family circle, a niece of the emperor could quite legitimately be addressed as „daughter” of her royal uncle.

Andronikos II therefore turned to his friend and ally the *Protos* Isaak, requesting in his usual direct manner¹² that Isaak should resolve as quickly as possible the issue which had been dragging on for years. The emperor did not feel obliged to refer to details, but he nonetheless emphasised the fact that it was in the empire’s interests to maintain good relations with the Bulgarian rulers. After the issue of the *prostagma* of Andronikos II all evidence of the affair was consigned to the archives of the monastery. We may safely assume

10. For Smilec (called Smiltzos by the Byzantines) and his wife Smiltzena, see G. MORAVCSIK, *Byzantinoturcica* II, Berlin 1958, p. 253.

11. L. MAVROMMATIS, *La fondation de l’ empire serbe: Le Kralj Milutin*, Thessalonica 1978, p. 116.

12. See J. BOMPAIRE, L. MAVROMMATIS, *La querelle des deux Andronic et le Mont-Athos en 1322*, *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 32 (1974), p. 197.

therefore that the *Protos* Isaak did indeed settle the differences between Zographou and Great Lavra; and this may be reflected in a much later record in Zographou which mentions the fact that the „judgement” (*krisimographon*), published by the *Protos* Isaak, had unfortunately been lost.

To conclude, I believe that the document was drawn up following appeals made by the monks of Zographou to Palaiologina, and that Andronikos II issued the *prostagma* in 1318 with a view to securing, among other things, good relations with Byzantium's neighbour Bulgaria, especially since his dispute with his grandson Andronikos III was already growing in intensity, and also in the face of ambiguous Serbian foreign policy.